



STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

INEZ MOORE TENENBAUM  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

October 23, 2001

**TO:** District Superintendents

**FROM:** Donald N. Tudor, Director  
Office of Transportation

**SUBJECT:** Unauthorized Use of School Buses

On June 14, 2001, Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum sent to each district superintendent a memorandum stating the State Department of Education's (SDE) concerns about the availability of adequate school transportation resources for FY 2002. In this memorandum, Superintendent Tenenbaum affirmed that there were "very few additional buses available to address additional needs." She also stated that the SDE was "facing a funding problem for school bus parts and fuel" and that she "could not guarantee you [districts] that staffing levels [maintenance technicians] are adequate to assure that bus inspection and repair of our aging fleet can be accomplished on schedule next year." In the weeks prior to this memorandum, the SDE staff reviewed the maintenance and inspection demands of the school bus fleet, and available maintenance resources, with the desire to create a spare bus ratio that could best assure the inspection and repair of the school bus fleet. In July 2001, the FY 2002 spare bus ratio was established and implemented statewide. An adequate spare bus fleet is imperative if the SDE is to assure compliance with school bus safety inspections and the annual repair program.

To assure that the spare school bus fleet is available to offer immediate support, many shops have located limited numbers of the spare school buses on district school bus parking facilities. This allows the district to use these vehicles should buses serving an approved route fail to start or have other safety or mechanical defects that would keep them from being operated.

In the last weeks, a few districts have started using these spare school buses, parked at district facilities, to supplement their approved regular school bus route system. When this happens, these buses are not being used as spares. This supplemental or additional route service has not been approved by the SDE and is, therefore, in violation of state law (S. C. Code Ann. § 59-67-490 (1990)). The SDE understands the need districts have to add school bus route service; however, this cannot be done without SDE approval and can have serious ramifications on the SDE inspection and repair program.

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Districts that are using spare buses to supplement regular route service are endangering the overall health of the school bus program, and the SDE cannot allow this to occur. Therefore, should a district be found using one of the spare school buses to supplement or add to the regular route service, the SDE will immediately inform the district superintendent that the improper use of state equipment has occurred. If the practice continues, the SDE must take the necessary corrective action.

If your district needs additional school buses, please submit the proper request and justification to the SDE County Supervisor serving your district. The SDE will make every effort to provide an additional school bus, once your request is approved and a school bus is available.

The shortage of school buses is a fact that we must all learn to cooperatively manage; this problem is with us for at least the next two to three years and will surely intensify.

DNT/bc

cc: District Transportation Supervisors  
SDE Area and County Supervisors